

## A Design Guide to House Extensions

### Introduction

This booklet is one of a series of information notes and fact sheets produced by the Planning Section. The purpose of this booklet is to help those considering applying for planning permission to extend their home and those employed to submit planning applications for others. The advice it contains is based on the principles of good design and is relevant to all house extensions including any exempt from requiring permission by virtue of being permitted development. (See Fact Sheet no.11\* for more information on permitted development rights.) Poorly designed alterations will detract from the appearance of a property and can reduce its value whilst good design can be achieved at good comparative cost and may avoid future expenditure associated with problems and maintenance resulting from poor design.

If planning permission is required for the proposed extension, it is important that accurate scaled drawings are prepared for which it may be advisable to consult a qualified architect or surveyor. Advice on submitting an application along with planning application forms can be found in an application fact pack entitled "Making a Householder Planning Application"\*. A separate application for Building Regulations Approval will almost always be needed for a house extension whether or not planning permission is required and it is advisable therefore to discuss your proposals with Building Control\*\*. Furthermore, your neighbour may have civil law rights or be in a position to invoke covenants, or the extension may fall within the scope of the Party Wall Act 1996. These are entirely separate matters from planning permission and it is your responsibility to check.

Policy HSG8 (house extensions) of the adopted Reading Borough Local Plan\* is a criteria based policy which controls the siting, design and impact of house extensions in the Borough. The purpose of this pamphlet is to explain how planning applications for house extensions can be made to comply with the criteria of this policy by giving relevant guidance and some examples of best practice. This Guidance does not prescribe inflexible standards or standardised solutions to meet the policy objectives, but describes the design principles to be aimed for. Please remember that this is guidance only and that your application will always be assessed on its merits. Furthermore, there may be other factors which have to be taken into account over and above the general guidelines eg trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order, listed buildings or conservation areas.

\* Copies of documents can be obtained from the Planning Section - see page 14 for further details.

\*\* Contact details provided on page 13 of this Guide

### General points

In summary, the criteria set out in HSG8 cover:

- the protection of, within reason, the amount of daylight and sunlight reaching adjacent properties,
- the protection of neighbours from loss of privacy through overlooking,
- the impact of the design, siting, size and choice of materials on the original house, the neighbouring properties and the character of the street generally,
- how much garden space will be left, and
- the protection of all trees which might be lost or put at risk as a result of the extension.

## A DESIGN GUIDE TO HOUSE EXTENSIONS

To demonstrate that your proposal complies with these criteria try to;

- prepare a design statement to accompany the application giving the results of your own site appraisal. Include in it the reason for the extension, the basis for the proposed design and choice of materials and why you consider that it will be acceptable in the context of the character of the existing house and the general area,
- calculate how much shadow would be created using daylight indicators and plot this onto your block plan,
- carry out an accurate site survey and plot the location of existing trees and structures and show ground levels on to the block plan. Do not rely on the Ordnance Survey being accurate or up to date,
- show on the block plan, and elevation drawings if necessary, where the neighbours' windows are and indicate which rooms they serve,
- talk to the neighbours about the scheme (before submitting the application) to iron out potential difficulties.

The following detailed design principles will help in achieving an acceptable standard of design:

- Windows or doors to be used in an extension should generally be of a style and material to match those in the original house. They should be of similar proportions and locations to those on the main building.
- External materials should be in keeping with the appearance of the original dwelling. New materials which are unrelated to the style of the original house should be avoided unless there is a valid aesthetic reason for their selection. It is also important with brick extensions to match as far as possible the bonding, mortar mix, colour and pointing.

## A DESIGN GUIDE TO HOUSE EXTENSIONS

- Architectural detailing on existing properties should be repeated where appropriate on any extension. The continuation of plinths, string courses, decorative brickwork, fascias etc are important elements in the overall design.

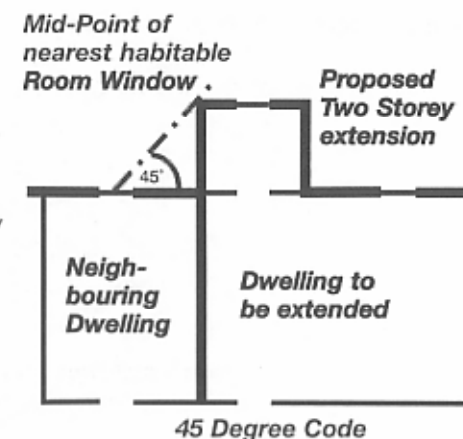
Following the above steps should indicate at an early stage what the site constraints are and dictate what form the extension should take. This will help you in preparing a planning application with a greater chance of being approved.

### Rear extensions

On semi-detached or detached houses the Council will normally not grant planning permission for rear extensions that are longer than 4 metres when measured from the back of the original house. Exceptions to this may be accepted if the house and garden are capable of taking an extension of a longer depth. Extensions should leave sufficient garden space for general use and penetration of light and sunlight. (Further guidance on this issue can be found in the Reading Borough Council publication "Space Around Dwellings").

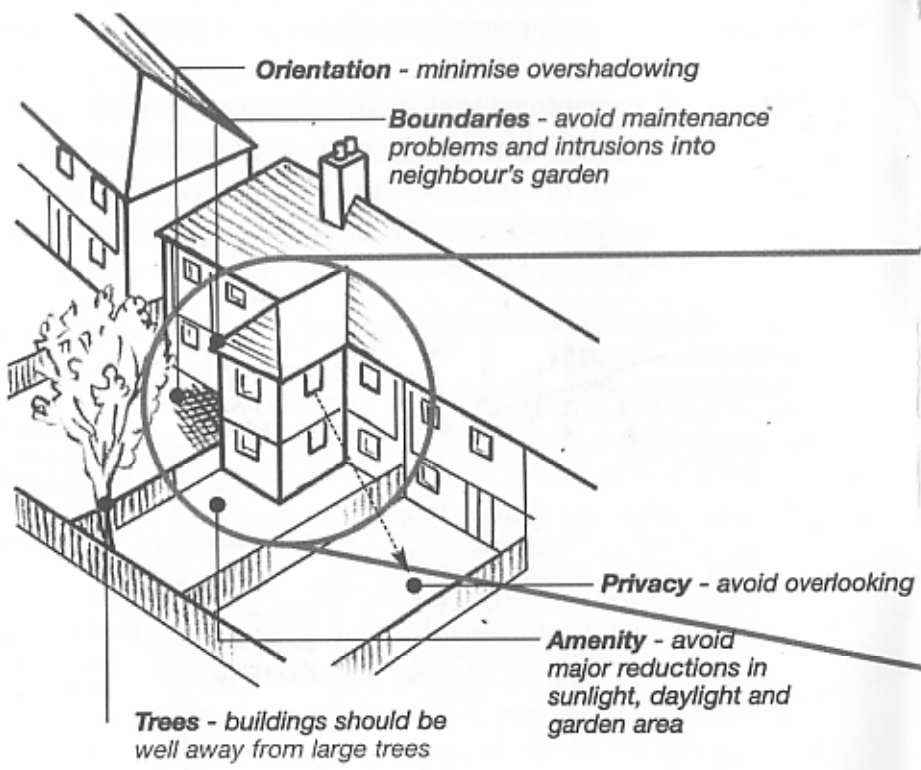
### Two story rear extensions should normally:

- a) Not extend more than four metres from the rear of the house.
- b) Not be closer than a line taken at 45 degrees from the middle of any window of a habitable room in a neighbouring property. Habitable rooms include bedrooms but exclude bathrooms, toilets, halls, landings and store rooms.



## A DESIGN GUIDE TO HOUSE EXTENSIONS

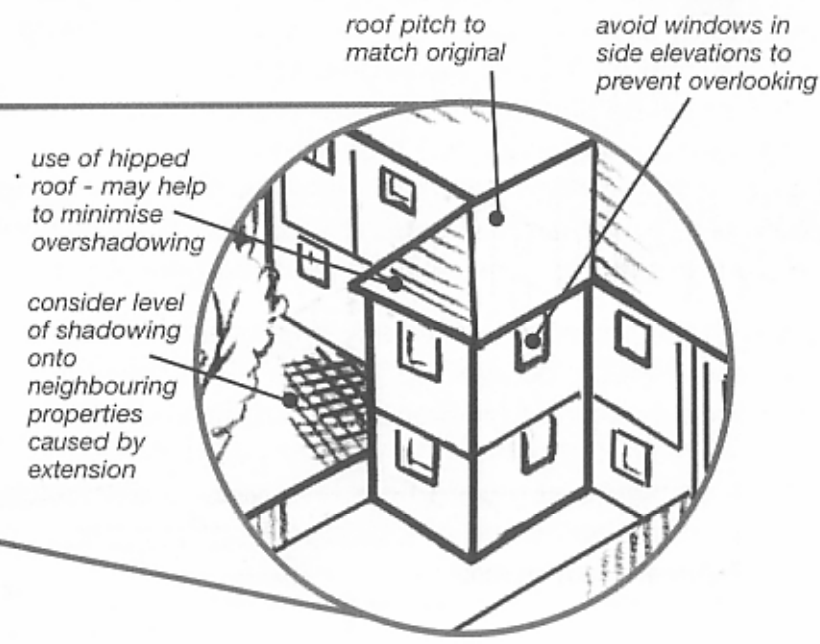
Rear extensions should be located as far away from side boundaries as possible. A basic way to protect light reaching main rooms in adjacent houses and to safeguard their outlook is to avoid extensions that would infringe on an area measured at an angle of 45° from the midpoint of the closest window to a habitable room in a neighbouring property. This is of particular importance for two storey extensions. Depending on the orientation of adjacent houses, changes in levels, intervening structures and the proposed height and roof design, the angle may be increased but justification for this must be given to ensure compliance with the relevant policy criteria.



## A DESIGN GUIDE TO HOUSE EXTENSIONS

For terraced housing, where rear extensions (including single storey ones) can have a significant and detrimental impact on neighbouring properties and the general appearance of the terrace the acceptability of a rear extension, in terms of length and height, will be derived from the particular circumstances of the application site. For example, do neighbouring properties have extensions? will a shadowed alleyway be created between properties? What orientation does the terrace have? By following the process advised in "General Points", you should be able to assess for yourself if a proposal will be acceptable.

To comply with the criteria aimed at protecting neighbours' privacy, side windows on rear extensions that will overlook neighbouring gardens should be avoided. Likewise, rear windows should not overlook the gardens or rear windows of houses that back on to the site to the extent that privacy is lost.



## A DESIGN GUIDE TO HOUSE EXTENSIONS

### Side extensions

Two storey side extensions should normally be designed to be smaller in scale than the main house. This can be achieved by setting the proposed front elevation further back than the front elevation of the original house, and maintaining a gap between neighbouring buildings by bringing the upper floor away from the side boundary. These devices should result in the ridgeline of the roof to the extension being significantly lower than that on the original house and the overall effect is an extension in proportion with the original house and normally with the neighbouring properties.

In streets with blocks of terraced houses, semi-detached houses and detached houses sited close together the existing gaps between properties are often a crucial factor in determining the appearance and character of a street. The loss of these gaps due to two storey side extensions can result in a terrace being formed visually and the loss of views between houses. The effect of this could be harmful to the local character by intensifying development in already high-density areas. Proposals for side extensions that will result in the loss of a gap to the detriment of the local character will fail the relevant policy criteria and will not normally be granted planning permission.

To comply with the protection of privacy criteria side windows on upper floor levels should be avoided. Where this is the only option they should either be high level or glazed with frosted glass and have restricted opening to prevent overlooking. Windows and doorways at ground floor level should be carefully sited to ensure that overlooking of existing windows in the adjacent property will not occur.

## A DESIGN GUIDE TO HOUSE EXTENSIONS

### AN EXISTING STREET SCENE...



### INSENSITIVELY DESIGNED EXTENSIONS CAN HAVE A DETRIMENTAL IMPACT ON THE STREET SCENE...

*No roof set down    Terracing effect    Unacceptable window detailing    unacceptable roof treatment*



*Extension not set back from front of house*

### SENSITIVELY DESIGNED EXTENSIONS CAN HARMONISE WITH THE EXISTING CHARACTER



*Set down roof line and set back from front elevation and side boundaries avoids terracing effect*

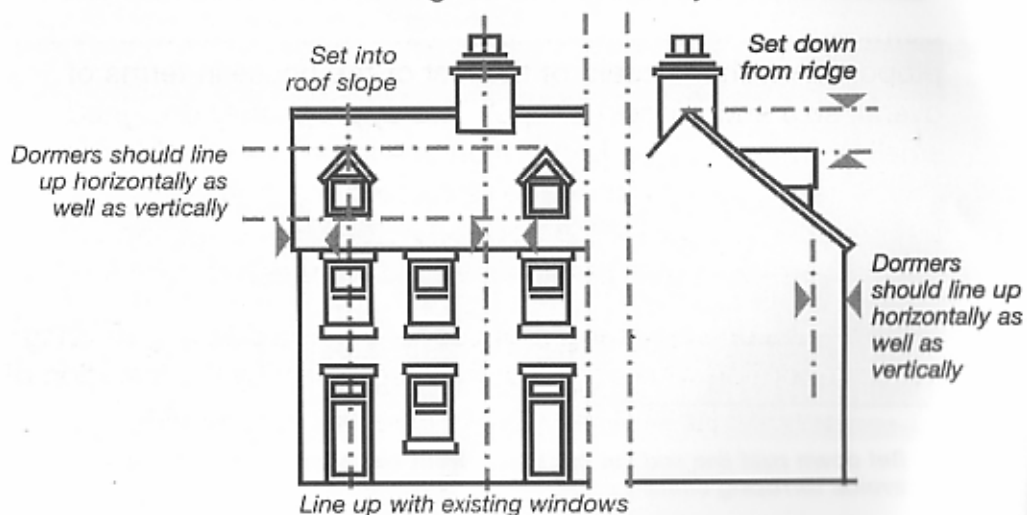
## A DESIGN GUIDE TO HOUSE EXTENSIONS

On end of terrace properties and pairs of semis the roof design should retain the symmetry of the original block or pair of houses if possible. However, in some cases, in order to avoid over shadowing neighbouring properties or creating too much mass a hipped roof rather than a gable may be accepted. In other cases, including single storey side extensions the roof design should complement the roof on the original house in terms of design and angle of pitch.

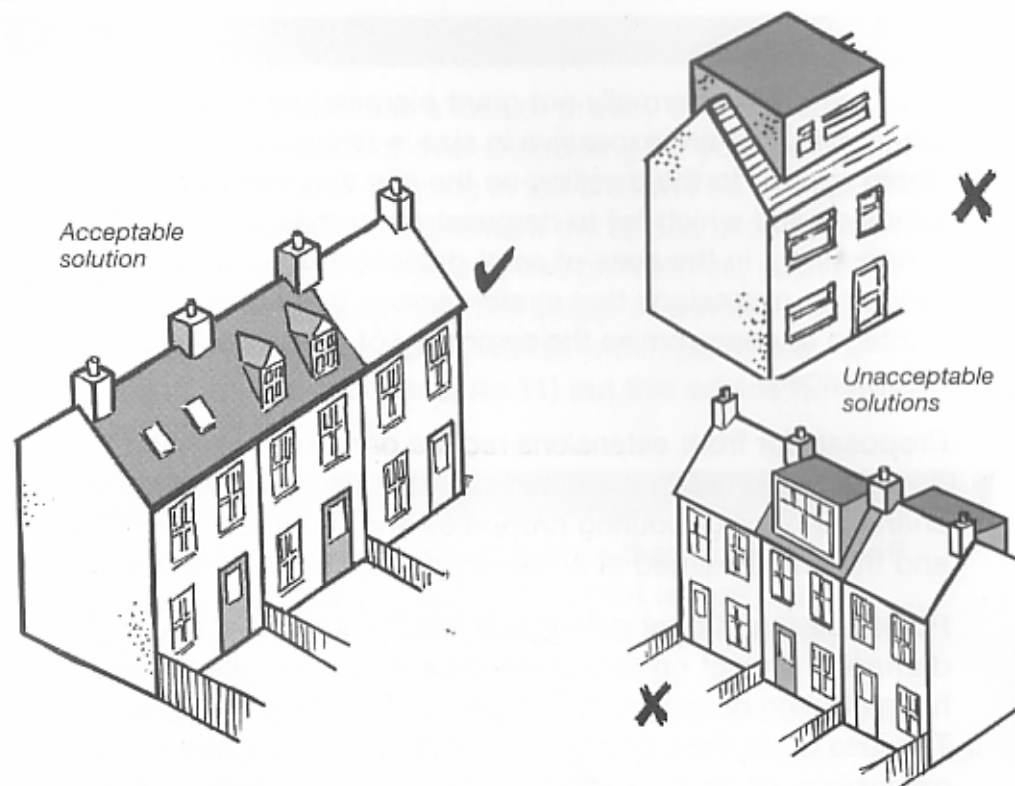
In all cases, if the side extension also projects into the rear of the property the advice given earlier in this booklet for rear extensions will also apply.

### Dormer extensions

Proposals for dormer extensions need to demonstrate compliance with the policy criteria relating to impact on the character of the original house and adjacent properties and the protection of privacy. Unfortunately, Reading has a few examples of box style (overly large and flat roofed) dormers on the front of houses or dormers of excessive size which demonstrate how harmful this type of extension can be if not designed with these key criteria in mind.



## A DESIGN GUIDE TO HOUSE EXTENSIONS



Dormer windows should be set within the roof slope and be in proportion with the scale of the rest of the house in terms of overall size and window shape. Two appropriately designed small dormers may be better than one large one in achieving this. It is important that dormers and rooflights reflect the pattern of existing window openings by being positioned to line through vertically with the window openings below.

The conversion of existing roof space within a dwelling to living accommodation where light is obtained solely by the insertion of velux type roof lights does not normally require planning consent.

### Front extensions & porches

The Council will normally not grant planning permission for front extensions that are excessive in size in terms of height and depth relative to the dwelling on the site and neighbouring buildings and which fail to demonstrate a balance of proportions. In the case of semi-detached or terraced properties extensions that stretch across the whole of the frontage or compromise the symmetry of design will be discouraged.

Proposals for front extensions require particular attention to detail to avoid failing the criteria relating to the protection of character of neighbouring properties and the street generally and the criteria aimed at achieving good, compatible design.

Poorly designed front extensions can have a major and damaging impact on the appearance of not just the subject house but on neighbouring properties and the street generally. The loss of daylight criteria also applies and may render front extensions, other than small porches, unacceptable for the many high-density terraced houses found in Reading.

Details such as materials, fenestration and roof pitch will have to complement the original building's design, age and scale. Adherence to these details may be enforced through conditions.

### Buildings in the garden

Structures that will cause a loss of privacy or result in an unreasonable amount of over shadowing for your neighbours or which will look out of keeping in the area will be refused. The new buildings should complement the appearance of the main house by reflecting the age and design features, such as, through matching materials, roof shape or window details. In many cases these structures will fall within permitted development (see fact sheet no.11) but this advice is relevant to all such developments.

### Fences and walls

The Council normally resists proposals that would close off views or change the character of a street unless positive improvement can be demonstrated. For example a 2 metre high wall or close-boarded fence on a street with all other properties having low hedges or post and rail fences will fail policy criteria, as it will obviously look out of character. It could also prevent pedestrians and motorists from seeing each other as vehicles pull out of driveways.

### Contacts and further advice

If you have any queries concerning the contents of this leaflet please contact the planning section for more advice on **0800 626540**. The Building Control Section can also be reached on this number. It is particularly important to seek guidance if your house is either listed or is within a conservation area.

The Local Plan and the following relevant fact sheets and information can be obtained from the planning reception on the ground floor at the Civic Offices and your local library should have a copy of the Local Plan for you to look at.

**Enlarged or black and white versions of this leaflet can also be provided.**

In accordance with PPG 12 "Development Plans", the Council issued a draft version of this document for public consultation between 1st November 2002 and 20th December 2002. The Consultation exercise was carried out in accordance with the Council's Consultation and Participation Policy and with the advice in the Council's, "Consultation Guidance Pack". The document was amended to address the issues raised in response to the consultation and the final version of the document was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by the Council on 17th March 2003. A copy of the report to Cabinet on 17th March 2003 which includes a statement of the consultation undertaken, the representations received and the local authority's response to those representations is available from the Council as a separate document (see above for contact details).

### Relevant Reading Borough Council Publications

Making a Householder Application

Making a Listed Building Application

Planning Application Checklist

Public Speaking at Planning Committee

Conservation Areas in Reading

Listed Buildings in Reading

Trees in Reading

Reading's Guide to Planning Enforcement

Planning Fact Sheet 4 – Trees on Development Sites

Planning Fact Sheet 9 - Working From Home

Planning Fact Sheet 11 - Permitted Development

Space Around Buildings

Building Control Services – A brief guide to the Building Regulations

Building Control Services – Here to help you comply with the Building Regulations

Building Control Services – Protecting your investment

Building Control Services – When is Building Regulations consent required

Building Control Services – Choosing your builder

### Relevant Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Publications

Planning – A Guide for Householders

The Party Wall etc. Act 1996 – explanatory booklet

A Developers Guide – A Checklist for Good Environmental Building